



**NOAA** NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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**NOAA sanctuary exploration center opens in Santa Cruz**  
*State-of-the-art facility will highlight region's marine ecosystem*

Officials from NOAA's Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the city of Santa Cruz today celebrated the opening of the Sanctuary Exploration Center, a state-of-the-art facility full of interpretive and hands-on exhibits highlighting the sanctuary's extraordinary natural and cultural resources. Exhibits include the Exploration Theater, a walk through a kelp forest, an intertidal touchpool, an open-ocean mini-theater, and a replica deep-sea canyon with a remotely operated vehicle.

Just steps from the ocean, the two-story, 12,387-square foot center located in Santa Cruz's famed beach area, the center will educate visitors as they learn about NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary system, ocean conservation partners, and the vital role citizens play as ocean stewards. The Exploration Center will also serve as a starting point for visitors to experience the sanctuary's other facilities and on-the-water activities.

"The Sanctuary Exploration Center encourages visitors of all ages to learn more about California's marine environment and issues affecting the sanctuary," said Paul Michel, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary superintendent. "One of our missions is to educate the public about the vital role of protecting one of the nation's most ecologically significant and stunning underwater treasures."

NOAA's Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the city of Santa Cruz and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation collaborated in a public-private partnership to design, construct and furnish the \$14.8 million Sanctuary Exploration Center.

"The Sanctuary Exploration Center is an amazing learning resource for visitors and locals alike and a testament to the vision and hard work of so many people who we will honor today," said Don Lane, mayor of Santa Cruz.

"What started as a tremendous vision for our beach front area is now a true community treasure which will generate multiple benefits for the local economy," said Bonnie Lipscomb, Santa Cruz's director of economic development.

NOAA and the city of Santa Cruz specified the project to be a model for sustainable, environmentally sensitive design, construction and operation. The Sanctuary Exploration Center implemented multiple strategies during the construction process using U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria. The Exploration Center was built with the highest of green standards and is currently pursuing certification for a Gold rating.

NOAA obligated \$11.44 million toward the project's design, development, permits and construction. The city of Santa Cruz and its Economic Development and Redevelopment Agency contributed the land, staff time, and city art. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation coordinated a still-ongoing \$3.4 million capital campaign for educational exhibits, along with the Sanctuary Exploration Center's Leadership Committee, composed of community leaders.

“The generous outpouring of financial and in-kind support for the Sanctuary Exploration Center is truly heartwarming,” said Fred Keeley, chairman of the Sanctuary Exploration Center Leadership Committee. “It’s the culmination of years of professional dedication by all levels of government, and every strata of our community.”

The center is located at the corner of Pacific Avenue and Beach Street within a district rich in visitor-oriented facilities and recreational attractions, including the Santa Cruz Wharf, the world-famous Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, Steamers Lane, Depot Park, and Lighthouse Point. An estimated 3.5 million people per year visit this area. The Sanctuary Exploration Center is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday and admission is free. All ages are welcome, with educational experiences appropriate for all ages.

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary stretches along the central California coast and encompasses 6,094 square miles of ocean area. Renowned for its scenic beauty and remarkable productivity, the sanctuary protects one of the world’s most diverse ecosystems. Designated in 1992, the sanctuary is also celebrating 20 years of successful ocean protection.

NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth’s environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on Facebook, Twitter and our other social media channels at <http://www.noaa.gov/socialmedia/>.

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Sanctuary Exploration Center: <http://montereybay.noaa.gov/vc/sec/welcome.html>